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The Banding Method of Bird Study

Recently some lecture notes, handed down by J. Eugene Law who promoted the bird-banding activities in the West from 1921 until his death in 1931, were found. Evidently he had used them in talking to a group of Cooper Club and Audubon Society members assembled on the Berkeley Campus in 1923. I can do no better, as a start in my assignment, than to quote part of these notes.

"I said banding was fascinating. It involves several elements which we, most of us, find thrilling in our daily life. To begin with, there is the element of chance in using a trap. The day's roll call cannot be foretold. I put out watermelon bait, thinking to catch my Linnet flock. The first bird to attack it was a Wren-tit, always a bundle of curiosity. A Plain Tit came for the seed. Hooded Orioles came in numbers, and one Black-headed Grosbeak. All carried away bands, each with a number of its own that no other bird was to wear. The Linnets came too, but only after they had been shown by the Wren-tit that watermelon was good to eat. Incidentally, a hummingbird found great sport in thrusting its beak, time and again, into bits of watermelon that I had put on a barbed-wire fence.

"Banding peculiarly combines pure pleasure and pure service. It is positively fascinating and every single band one places on a bird carries with it latent scientific value . . . No spot on earth is so lean as to be entirely devoid of bird life. Every person needs a little of just the sort of absorbing relaxation that bird-banding affords, and his best results can be obtained in his own back yard. A morning half-hour and a Sunday forenoon can yield no better sport to a bird lover. The birds in his yard at once take on new interest. His proprietary instincts are aroused to pleasure when he detects his banded friends.

"Then there is the element of new acquaintance. No handshake, perhaps, will ever give you the thrill that will come to you when you first hold a bird in your hand, alive and unhurt, and I venture to say that your first bird will be less frightened than you will be. This intimate contact with a bird is a very personal thing. They, like people, have marked personalities. One squeals, another nips your fingers, yet another nestles quietly in your hand and even tarries when you gently open your hand, and it is free to go . . . So there is the thrill of new acquaintances seeking you out daily, and there is the thrill of old acquaintances coming back to call on you and let you read their numbers.

"But there is also the appeal of real service. The collaborators will become

participants in a great research movement. Each will be developing notes which will interest his fellows and from time to time surprises of great importance in the advancement of our knowledge of the birds are bound to come to him. Mrs. Allen's record of the return to her food table for a second season of a White-throated Sparrow is one of these instances. Perhaps you read the account in the last Condor. (*The Condor*, 25:141-142, 1923) The normal range of the species is east of the Rockies. Mrs. Allen banded a straggler which came to her yard and had the satisfaction of retaking it and determining its number the following winter."

So this is what Mr. Law saw in bird-banding only four years after S. Prentiss Baldwin, of Cleveland, Ohio, the first in this country to trap birds extensively for banding, had published some of his results, and three years after the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey (now the Fish and Wildlife Service) began its promotion and control of the banding of birds in this country.

Now, looking back 23 years, it is seen that his enthusiastic visions of the results to be had from the banding method of bird study have come true and that he could have gone much farther in his predictions of its scientific value. There have been so many excellent ornithological articles, based largely on this method of bird study, published during the last two decades that bird-banding must be recognized as one of the most important methods of investigation for both professional and amateur ornithologists. The records in print of these investigations range all the way from items of a few lines in length in the mimeographed news letters of the banding associations to articles in the leading ornithological journals, and whole books dealing with such subjects as age, behavior, coloration, diseases and distribution.

The development of colored celluloid bands has added immeasurably to the ability to study the lives of individual birds. With these bands in combinations with numbered aluminum bands, the operator of a banding station can give recognizable individual markings to hundreds of birds of a species, or more than one species if he chooses. With his birds so marked, the extent to which he can study their lives in the vicinity of his banding station is limited only by the time he has to spend observing, recording and trapping to get newcomers banded, and , eventually analyzing the records. The enjoyment and acquisition of information begins immediately with the first bird that is given a color combination. At the Michener station, in Pasadena, some years ago, 80 Mockingbirds were identified and recorded by their color-band combinations at one food table in one hour, and this was not an unusual hour. While it was spectacular and informative to have so many coming to a single spot, the real pay-off came from studies of those individually recognizable birds in their own territories which ranged from less than 100 feet to about one-half mile from the food table common to all. Cull raisins were their favorite food—and what quantities they did consume! Color-banding of the same species should not be undertaken at two banding stations between which there is any appreciable interchange of individuals of the species, unless there is an agreement on the color combinations to be used at each station.

An example of co-operative color-banding is found in the Pacific Gull Color-Banding Project, sponsored by the Western Bird-Banding Association for the study of gull migration and life history, and actively guided by Mrs.

M. C. Sargent, chairman of the committee and editor of the *News from the Bird Banders*. Beginning in 1938, young gulls of several species were banded in their nesting colonies along the coast from North Coronado Island, Mexico, off San Diego, California, to Alaska, and at Mono Lake, Great Salt Lake and vicinity. These gulls were banded with combinations of the aluminum band and two colored bands such that the birds were marked distinctively for the colony and for the year of banding. Throughout the West a request was widely distributed that anyone seeing a gull so marked should report it, giving the order of the bands on each leg from top down, to Mrs. M. C. Sargent, Box 109, La Jolla, California. Many observations have been recorded and some interesting things have been learned about gulls. Interim reports have been published in *The Condor* and the *News from the Bird-Banders* an up-to-date report, perhaps the final one, is expected to appear in an early number of *The Condor*.

An applicant for a Scientific Bird-Banding Permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C., must be at least 18 years old, must know the common birds where he proposes to band and must give names of at least two ornithologists as references. A State Permit is also required which in California, is issued by the Division of Fish and Game.

The banding method of bird study opens two main avenues. One, largely individualistic, leads to intimate knowledge of the birds that frequent one's station, knowledge of their personalities, their trials and triumphs, their plumages, their every characteristic. The other carries the bander into that great co-operative effort, the most spectacular result of which was the discovery, about two years ago that Peru is the winter home of the Chimney Swifts that summer from Ontario, Canada, to Georgia. Thirteen bands from these birds were delivered by Indians who live on the Yanayaco River in the extreme north of Peru. These two main efforts are closely related. Birds banded for study at home may yield information on migration or vice versa. The Western Bird-Banding Association stands ready to help any who wish to follow this method of bird study.

—Harold Michener

July Field Trip

On Sunday, July 14, 1946, Audubon members and guests met at the end of the No. 1 and No. 2 car lines near Sutro Park at 10 o'clock. Mrs. Sadie Bezzant lead a group around Sutro Park while the members gathered for the Cliff Walk with Mrs. George T. Kilham as leader. Mr. John A. Keating lead the members on an observation walk around the Chain of Lakes later in the afternoon. Mr. Arthur H. Myer, past-president and Boy Scout Master, brought Leland Shain from Troop 17 and Grant Settlemier from Troop 100. Their list included: Brown Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Western Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, Anna Hummingbird, Allen Hummingbird, Red-shafted Flicker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Cliff Swallow, American Raven, Chickadee, Robin, English Sparrow, Brewer Blackbird, House Finch, Pine Siskin, Spotted Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow. Arkansas Goldfinch and Oregon Junco were noticed.

The highlight of the trip was finding two Pigeon Guillemots with young nesting on the ledge of one of the cliffs. Twelve more guillemots were seen flying in the vicinity. A string of seventy-five Double-crested Cormorants flew through the Golden Gate out to sea. These who continued to the Chain

of Lakes found two American Coots in their nest on the reeds. The young were being fed by their parents.

July Meeting

The regular meeting of the Audubon Association was held on July 11, 1946, with the president, Miss Jean Bradford Fay, presiding.

Mr. Herman Leffler moved that a letter be sent to Miss Paroni expressing the appreciation of the group for her excellent work as editor of *The Gull*.

Miss Fay presented to the San Francisco Public Library a collection of books which Miss Mary Richards had given to the Audubon Association of the Pacific in memory of her sister, Miss Elizabeth M. Richards. Mr. Laurence J. Clark received the books in the name of the library and expressed his appreciation of this fine addition to the San Francisco Public Library. He also spoke briefly of future plans for the library.

Dr. Jean Linsdale of the Hastings Reservation presented the program assisted by Mrs. T. Eric Reynolds. Dr. Linsdale spoke on the subject "The Hastings Natural History Reservation." The lecture was illustrated with films taken by Mrs. Reynolds, and a natural history film of the Yellow-billed Magpie taken by Dr. Linsdale. Sixty members and guests were present.

—Monica Goen, *Recording Secretary*

August Meeting

The 347th meeting of the Audubon Association of the Pacific will be held on Thursday, August 8, 1946 at 8:00 p.m. in the Assembly Room of the San Francisco Public Library at Larkin and McAllister Streets. The speaker of the evening, Dr. Robert C. Miller, Director of the California Academy of Sciences, will take as his subject "The Flight of Albatrosses and Other Sea Birds." Meet at the Lotus Bowl, 626 Grant Ave., at 6:00 p.m. for a no-host dinner preceding the meeting.

August Field Trip

On August 11, 1946 Mr. Donald Brock will lead the group on a field trip to the U. C. Campus and Strawberry Canyon in Berkeley. Meet at the corner of University and Oxford Street at 9:50 a.m. Members and friends coming from San Francisco take the F train leaving the Key System Terminal at 9:10 a.m. Get off at the corner of University and Shattuck. Walk two blocks east on University to Oxford Street. East bay people take No. 5 or No. 6 car. Bring lunch and binoculars.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

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For the Study and the Protection of Birds

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Monthly meetings second Thursday, 8:00 p. m.		
Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Sts., San Francisco		
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Student memberships, \$1.50 per year		Life memberships, \$50.00